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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 002067

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H PASS FOR SENATOR NELSON

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [OREP](#) [BA](#) [REGION](#) [OFFICIALS](#)
SUBJECT: SENATOR NELSON AND CROWN PRINCE DISCUSS REGIONAL
ISSUES

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Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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Summary

¶1. (C) In their December 18 meeting, Crown Prince Salman told Senator Nelson that Bahrain is 100 percent committed to the bilateral relationship and credited the United States with protecting the stability and security of the region. The Senator briefed Shaikh Salman on his recent meeting with Syrian President Asad, saying he had had "sharp words" with Asad about Lebanon. Asad had implied that he might want to cooperate with the United States and Iraq on controlling the Syrian-Iraqi border. The CP said that Iran uses Syria as a conduit to Hizballah and Hamas, and it was better to draw Syria away from Iran than to allow their alliance to strengthen. On Iraq, Shaikh Salman suggested that U.S. troops draw back from the front lines and consolidate so as to take fewer casualties. He thought a 50-60,000 member U.S. rapid reaction force was most appropriate. He called Iran the greatest long-term threat in the region and worried that if the Iranian regime felt threatened, it might try to take down as many others as it could. End Summary.

Strong Bilateral Relationship

¶2. (C) Opening their December 18 meeting, Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa thanked Senator Nelson (D-FL) for visiting Bahrain and cited the strength of the U.S.-Bahrain relationship, which has existed for over 100 years. He said the United States protects the stability and security of the region, which allows countries to develop and prosper. Bahrain, he said, is "100 percent" committed to the relationship.

Lebanon and Syria

¶3. (C) The Senator told Shaikh Salman that he had met with Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora after an earlier meeting with Syrian President Asad, and he had told Siniora that he had had "sharp words" with Asad about Lebanon. The Senator told Asad that he supported Siniora; Asad replied that he did not.

¶4. (C) The Senator said that Asad had been evasive during their meeting, as he had been three years ago when the

Senator had met him. However, this time Asad had been different in two ways: first, he had implied that he might want to cooperate with the United States and Iraq on controlling the Syrian-Iraqi border, and second, Asad had requested no quid pro quo for this possible cooperation. The Senator had emphasized that it was in Syria's interest to control the border, to keep in check any possible refugee inflow and to create the conditions for a future pipeline from Kirkuk to the Syrian coast. Regarding Syria's relationship with Iran, the Senator had told Asad that ultimately Iran might become a threat to Syria and the whole Arab world. Asad had disagreed.

Libya a Model for Syria Diplomacy

15. (C) The Crown Prince stated that Syria is the linchpin for any strategy to contain Iran, which represents the greatest threat to the region. It is actively pursuing the building blocks for nuclear weapons and uses Syria as a conduit to Hizballah and Hamas. Shaikh Salman said there could be an opportunity for constructive diplomacy with Syria based upon the Libya model. Just as the West had pressured Libya over the Lockerbie bombing, it could pressure Syria over the Hariri assassination. Drawing Syria away from Iran is a better situation than allowing them to build a strong alliance. Because Syria is so isolated, it would likely want guarantees that the U.S. will not pursue regime change in exchange for cooperation.

16. (C) The Crown Prince continued that Saudi Arabia is overtly angry with Syria and had pushed Asad away. But in a less emotional context, would regime change really be a favorable outcome? Shaikh Salman said he doubted it would be because a successor regime, likely led by Sunni extremists, would be worse than Asad.

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Withdraw Troops from Iraqi Front Lines

17. (C) Senator Nelson asked the Crown Prince for his views on the situation in Iraq. The CP replied that the GOI had to address four main issues: de-Baathification, which had gone too far and was too harsh; distribution of oil income; federalism, specifically, whether Iraq should be composed of three or 18 regions; and disarming militias. He suggested that the U.S. withdraw troops from the front lines and consolidate its forces so as to take fewer casualties. The security situation would likely decline, but this would force Iraqis to take on a greater measure of the security responsibilities themselves and look to their neighbors for support. The U.S. could intervene if necessary. This situation is preferable to the U.S. "half committing" to providing security in Iraq or increasing the number of U.S. troops in the country.

18. (C) The Senator reported that Saudi Arabia supported fixing a timetable for a complete pull-out of U.S. forces as a means to encourage Iraqis to work together. The CP said that this was not enough and would not work. He recommended that the U.S. draw down to about 50-60,000 troops, which would serve as a rapid reaction force. He thought GCC countries would probably support a U.S. rapid reaction force in Iraq, and they might even contribute troops if Iraq requested them to do so.

19. (C) The Crown Prince said that what the United States tried to do in Iraq was very hard and the U.S. had underestimated the difficulties. Iraq will never be a model for democracy in the region. The United States should empower PM Al Maliki, but it cannot do it alone. The U.S. should get Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and others to help.

Iran the Greatest Long-Term Threat

¶10. (C) Switching gears, the Crown Prince said that the U.S. cannot confront Iran while it is tied up in Iraq. Iran represents the greatest long-term threat in the region. It wants to develop long-range ballistic nuclear missiles. A project like this requires the resources of a state behind it, and goes well beyond what a group like Al Qaida could do.

The Senator asked the Crown Prince his view of whether Iran might take offensive action against oil interests. The Crown Prince responded that "rationality is overrated," particularly if the Iranian regime feels its entire existence is threatened. They might try to take down as many others with them as they could. Additionally, Iran could try to stir up trouble inside the GCC, for example in Bahrain and Dubai. The CP said that Bahrain is interested in pursuing an integrated air and missile defense system with the United States and other GCC countries to harden its defenses against Iran.

¶11. (C) The Senator asked Shaikh Salman his thoughts on the possibility of a terrorist attack on an oil tanker. The CP responded that some extremist groups are perpetuating a cult-like philosophy that glorifies death. These extremists can never be brought into the mainstream. A tanker going down is not a strategic issue, but it highlights the need for alternatives to shipping oil through the Strait of Hormuz. The region also needs a way to react quickly to an environmental incident. Bahrain worries about something happening at Iran's Bushehr reactor that results in the contamination of Gulf waters. Bahrain obtains 70 percent of its potable water through desalination, and it cannot afford to face the disaster of radiated Gulf waters.

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